

To Chairman Kerns and members of the Montana House Judiciary Committee:

I am Lyle Hamilton, a retired United Methodist minister living in Helena. My wife, Marianne Niesen is an ordained and still an active United Methodist pastor, serving in her 19th year as the Senior Pastor of St. Paul's United Methodist Church. Although she cannot be with us in person this morning, I am empowered to speak for both of us.

Marianne and I both, as progressively oriented protestant clergy, without hesitation, **speak out very strongly in favor** of House bill 536, "an act providing restrictions for the use of long term solitary confinement, and providing definitions, prohibitions, limitations, determination and due process, conditions, and documentation."

We are especially concerned about long term solitary confinement for children and teens who, even though they have offended society with egregious and heinous crimes, they need not only punishment, but personal protection and treatment (mental, emotional, and physical health) by professionals who can assist them to continue to grow into adulthood. After all, it matters not whether these young ones are declared to be "adult" for prosecution and judgment purposes . . . they are still simply children and juveniles in grave trouble.

Let us remember that locking kids in solitary confinement is child abuse by another name. Yet thousands of kids are locked in tiny cells for 22 – 24 hours per day, for days, weeks, or months at a time – "as officially sanctioned government punishment or a misguided effort to protect them." This is a type of cruel and unacceptable treatment that in my mind and soul reflects intentional terrorism that destroys rather than rehabilitates, stunts personal growth rather than teaching these young ones and preparing them to re-enter society when their sentence is completed.

Please hear my plea, and vote to support House Bill 536. This act will help our judicial system in Montana to be redemptive and rehabilitative as well as judgmental and punitive. I am convinced that our faith calls, claims, and names us for a time, and action, such as this. Thank you for your interest, concern, and support.